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Chapter 1

Introduction

> *"Jealous stepmother and sisters; magical aid by a beast; a marriage won by gifts magically provided; a bird revealing a secret; a recognition by aid of a ring; or show; or what not; a démouement of punishment; a happy marriage - all those things, which in sequence, make up Cinderella, may and do occur in an incalculable number of other combinations. "*
>
> — MR. Cox ***1893****, Cinderella: Three hundred and forty-five variants [*? *]*

The Web Consortium (W3C) standardized bytecode for the web environment with the WebAssembly (Wasm) language in 2015. Wasm allows browsers to execute existing programs or libraries that are written in other languages, such as C/C++ and Rust. It also claims that is better than JavaScript to perform compute-intensive tasks [**?**]. Further browser environments, WebAssembly is a promising technology that evolves to be a new technology for Edge-Cloud computing platforms, resulting in bandwidth saving, execution improvement, and process-on-demand fast spawning [**? ?**]. Despite being designed for sandbox and secure execution, it is not exempt of vulnerabilities [**? ?**]. For example, WebAssembly engines are vulnerable to speculative execution [**?**], and C/C++ source code vulnerabilities are ported to Wasm binaries [**?**].

One strategy to hide such vulnerabilities is to move them in time as a preemptive solution. The goal is to make potential vulnerabilities available only in a time window. This strategy is usually called Moving Target Defense (MTD). MTD for software was first proposed as a collection of techniques that aim to improve the security of a system by constantly moving its vulnerable components [**? ?**]. MTD increases uncertainty for potential attackers since malicious users cannot hit what they cannot see. Yet, one premise for implementing MTD is the need of at least two variants of the same program. By switching the deployment and execution between at least two variants, a potential attacker needs to make double efforts perform the same attack for both variants if they are different. The program variants are not always present, presenting a lack of natural diversity [**?**]. Yet, program variants could be artifically created.

Our exhaustive literature review shows a lack of software diversification approaches for hardening WebAssembly as a preemptive technique. With this work, we aim to generate artificial software diversification for WebAssembly. To reach such a goal, we answer three research questions enunciated in the following.

1.1 Research questions

In this section, we present our three research questions. Our research questions are formulated by merging our publications and experiences during the creation of Software Diversification for WebAssembly.

RQ_1 **To what extent can we artifically generate program variants for WebAssembly?**
With this research question, we quantitatively assess the static differences between program variants created by our approach. We answer this question at the population level, where a program population is the collection of one original program and its generated variants. We aim to investigate the code properties that increases(or diminishes) generated diversification at population level.

RQ_2 **To what extent are the generated variants dynamically different?**
With this research question, we complement RQ_1. We aim to investigate the impact on execution traces and execution times of the generated program variants.

RQ_3 **To what extent do the artificial variants exhibit different execution times on Edge-Cloud platforms?**
With this research question, we aim to investigate the impact of Software Diversification for WebAssembly in an emerging technology, Edge-Cloud computing. We evaluate the impact of a novel multivariant execution approach on real-world WebAssembly programs in a world-wide scale experiment.

1.2 Contributions

This thesis contributes through four milestones. First, as a theoretical contribution, we summarize the code transformations used to artifically generate software diversification through an exhaustive literature review. Consequently, we highlight the lack of diversification techniques for WebAssembly. In addition, we discuss the incorporation of *constant Inferring* as a new transformation. Second, as a technical contribution, we provide two tools, CROW [**?**] and MEWE [**?**]. Besides, we summarize the main challenges faced during their implementation. Third, we propose a methodology to quantitatively evaluate the impact of our tools, assessing the creation of artificial software diversification for WebAssembly. Fourth and final, we empirically demonstrate the impact on static and dynamic behavior for our diversification technique.

1.3 Publications

This work is based on the following publications:

P_1 Superoptimization of WebAssembly Bytecode [**?**]
Javier Cabrera-Arteaga, Shrinish Donde, Jian Gu, Orestis Floros, Lucas Satabin, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus
Programming 2020, MoreVMs'20

P_2 CROW: Code Diversification for WebAssembly [**?**]
Javier Cabrera-Arteaga, Orestis Floros, Oscar Vera-Pérez, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus
NDSS 2021, MADWeb

P_3 Multi-Variant Execution at the Edge [**?**]
Javier Cabrera-Arteaga, Pierre Laperdrix, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry
Under review

Other publications and talks

1. Scalable Comparison of JavaScript V8 Bytecode Traces [**?**]
Javier Cabrera-Arteaga, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry
SPLASH 2019, VMIL

2. (Talk) Wasm-mutate: Fuzzing WebAssembly Compilers with E-Graphs
Javier Cabrera-Arteaga, Nicholas Fitzgerald, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry
PLDI 2022, EGRAPHs

Thesis layout

This dissertation is organized in five chapters including this. **??** presents background and the state of the art for WebAssembly and Artificial Software Diversification. **??** describes our technical contributions, faced challenges and engineering decisions carried out to implement our artifacts. **??** describes the methodology followed to answer the three main research questions driving this thesis. **??** details the main results of this work. **??** concludes and discuss future work. In addition, this dissertation contains the collection of research papers previously mentioned in this chapter.

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